

## MARY MURPHY.

There are pleasanter ways of spending one's time than in making beds and washing dishes and catching small boys to go of errands; and August weather is not usually the most favorable for one of those interregnums that are apt to occur where the household force is limited to a solitary "help." But Bridget was off on her wedding-tour—one of those utterly unexpected and unwelcome happenings that are forever obtruding themselves when deluded souls that dream of bliss imagine themselves to be comfortably settled for an indefinite period.

Brunhilda and I were fairly sick of general housework, and could cheerfully have shot the remorseless milkman who persisted in making us a morning call at the witching hour of 5 a.m.; while the front-door bell generally was the plague of our lives.

So, when it rang at 3 o'clock on the hottest of hot afternoons, just when we had donned our undress uniforms and settled our brains for a long summer's nap, we felt a little like—well, if a man were writing this, he would probably say *swearing*.

"Let them ring!" said I, viciously, "I shall not go down."

Brunhilda looked reflective. "We might lose a great deal in that way," said she. "I think I will look out of the window, at least."

Brunhilda is always expecting things; she seems to fancy that she is living in one of Wilkie Collins's novels.

"A very lady-like looking person," she reports, presently, from her point of observation through the blinds of a front window; "but what can she want at this melting time of day?"

And hastily spearing her disordered locks with two or three mammoth hair-pins, she slips into civilized attire with marvelous celerity, and glides down stairs. I laugh quietly, for Brunhilda's curiosity is quite a family legend; and it will probably be rewarded in this case by a book agent, or an inquiry for some other house in the neighborhood, or a solicitation for charity.

Presently, however, I am called, and requested to come down stairs; and wondering what it can mean, I too adorn myself with hair-pins and the regulation dress, and follow in the footsteps of my younger sister.

Brunhilda is comfortably perched on the stairs—there seems to be a prevalent idea that this point is a sort of refrigerator in hot weather—and seated on one of the hall chairs is a plump, sweet-looking girl in a plain black dress and dainty straw hat. She glances up at me as I descend, and then modestly drops her long lashes over the soft gray eyes. It is none of my funeral; and I look at Brunhilda inquiringly.

"This—this young person," she announces, hesitatingly, "is looking for a place."

My inward amazement is only equalled by my outward composure, as I ask the pretty vision before me, "Did any one send you here?"

She smiles, and *suck* a smile! Ah, me! what it is to be in one's teens, and have white teeth and dimples!

"No'm," she replies, in the sweetest of voices; "but I was passing by—and I liked the flowers and the look of things—and I thought I'd see if you wanted a girl."

All this was very interesting, of course, and quite out of the common way; but Brunhilda and I have not cut all our wisdom-teeth for nothing, and do not, as a general thing, engage our domesticities upon the plea of their liking the look of things. When we asked for references, the girl colored vividly, and took from her bag a carefully folded slip of paper, on which was written legibly:

This is to certify that Mary Murphy is a member in good and regular standing, of the Fourth Presbyterian Church.

[Signed] JAMES ELLSWORTH, Pastor.

"But this does not qualify you for housework," said I, laughing a little at the novelty of the recommendation.

"No'm," replied Mary, with another of her smiles; "but I can do housework, and I think I could suit you. Perhaps you wouldn't mind trying me, if you have no girl at present?"

I telegraphed to Brunhilda, "What do you think?" and she telegraphed back, "Take her," and the result was that in a very short time pretty Mary Murphy, who really looked better suited to the parlor, was established in our kitchen, and running the domestic machinery with an ease and rapidity that made housekeeping perfectly idyllic.

Never had we been so respectfully served, nor accomplished the feat of three meals a day and various other necessities of living with so little creaking of machinery and rasping against the higher nature; and we found ourselves wondering how life had ever progressed with us hitherto without our

kitchen fairy. Every one told us that we had a "treasure," and her very manner of opening the door to a visitor was bewitching; while grocers' young men and the milk-man and butcher seemed to linger entranced when they came to deliver their wares. Mary took their compliments calmly, and had a ready smile for them all, without departing from the quiet dignity of her ways, and we felt no shadow of coming evil, until matters began to look serious with the one-armed postman.

This same postman had delivered our letters regularly for the last two years, always in the same business-like way, never lingering for a moment, never by any possibility smiling or exchanging a word with either of us, and yet we looked upon him quite in the light of a friend, and speculated about his history, as lonely women will about those with whom they come in contact. He had been in the army and had lost an arm; this was all we knew about him, except that he was evidently a German, and quite good-looking—not to say scholarly in his aspect.

"Were you aware," asked Brunhilda one morning, with an ominous expression, "that Miss Murphy speaks German?"

"Speaks German!" I repeated, in amazement. "And pray how did you find it out?" For Brunhilda's knowledge of German matches Shakespeare's Greek and Latin.

"By hearing her address the postman in that delightful musical and easily acquired tongue," was the reply.

"And what did he say?" I continued, excitedly.

"As nearly as I could make out, this was his rejoinder," and Brunhilda obligingly perpetrated a series of growls, with a squeal at the end of each one, which, so far as we were concerned, effectually illustrated Talleyrand's definition of language.

We both laughed, but with a chilling sort of presentiment that this was no laughing matter.

"I shall nip this in the bud," said I, severely. But presently better thoughts came to me. I remembered my own youth, and I remembered *Crawford*, where Miss Mattie, after the death of an old lover, softens to Martha and allows "followers."

A week or two passed, and I was attending to my preserves one day in the kitchen—it was a pleasure to do anything in Mary's kitchen, every thing looked so immaculately clean, almost poetical, I thought—and I approached the subject uppermost in my mind by saying, carelessly,

"So, Mary, you know German, it seems. How does that happen?"

Mary's pretty face was overspread by a rosy cloud as she replied, in a low tone, "I picked it up by myself. I had some German books once."

Then she sat down and cried, very much to my bewilderment; and presently she exclaimed, "I should like to tell you something, Miss Darlingford; I shall feel better when you know all."

"I hope," said I, with a vague expectation of dreadful developments, "that 'all' is not very bad, Mary?"

The flush deepened on the pretty face, but for answer she took from her bosom a black ribbon to which was fastened a plain gold ring. I dropped my preserves in amazement; the girl looked so young.

"You are a widow, then?" said I, with a feeling of tender pity. "Poor child!"

"I don't know whether I am or not," was the reply, with a fresh burst of tears, "and that is what troubles me so."

I turned to my preserves again, with a smile, as I thought of the good-looking German postman.

"Miss Darlingford," continued the girl, more composedly, "I want to tell you *every thing*, and I am sorry now that I didn't do this at first. But I felt that it would be against me, and I had to get a place. I have a boy six years old—"

"In the name of wonder," I exclaimed, "how old are you yourself?"

"I am twenty-five," she said, a little proudly; "and Mr. Blumenthal promises to take care of Willie; he wants me to let him pay his board now."

Here I sat down hard in a chair to collect myself. People have other things besides greatness thrust upon them; and I saw that I was destined to prove a most unwilling benefactress to the one-armed postman. Why is it, I thought, bitterly, that if one ever does happen upon that *rara avis*, a model servant, and all the powers of darkness seem leagued together to spirit her away?

"Where is your child?" I asked, with a strong effort.

"I have put him to board a little way out of town," replied the girl, sadly. "He is with a friend of mine, who takes good care of him; and I always go to see him on my afternoons out; but I do miss him so!"

And here she broke down again.

"But what does it all mean?" I continued, for my sympathies were getting dreadfully worked upon. "Why are you not living with your husband, if he is alive? or why do you not know it, if he is dead? Just tell me the whole story, Mary, from beginning to end."

At this point Brunhilda, who always scents a romance from afar, appeared upon the scene, and gracefully established herself upon the kitchen dresser.

"Seven years ago," said Mary, "when I married William Murphy, I thought there was no one like him in the world; and I should think so yet if he hadn't nearly worried the life out of me. But I shall always believe that his mother was to blame for it all. She was that jealous of Will that it sometimes seemed as if she would like to scratch my eyes out. We lived with the old people for a year or two; but after little Willie was born I had no peace at all for his grandmother, who insisted on having her way with him, and I naturally thought that I had a right to mine."

"The old people had money, and lived very comfortably, and Will and his father carried on a coal-yard together; but Will fell into bad company, and took to drinking, and his father and mother were so bitter towards him, it drove him to desperation. You see, they were people who had always been respected, and they couldn't bear the disgrace; and many's the night I've sat up watching for Will, so that they shouldn't know when he came in. I taught myself German, by way of amusement, on those lonely evenings. Some one gave the books to Will, and I had always been fond of study at school."

"After a while we left the old people, and moved into two rooms of our own; and I worked hard at sewing and knitting and any thing I could get to support us. Will did not improve, though he was never unkind to me; and one morning a boy brought me a crumpled note from my husband telling me that he had gone to California, and that he would never come back unless he came a sober man, and with money to support me and our boy. His father had been harder with him than ever, and he said that he was sick of it all; and as he was of no use to us, he would not stay to be a disgrace. I have never heard from him since."

"Will's mother came to me and said that she should look upon the boy as hers now, and we must go home with her at once. But I put her off, to gain a little time; for I was young, you see, and ignorant, and I was afraid she had the power to *make* me go; and when she left me, I just packed my clothes and Willie's, and went off to the depot, and came to L—. I had this friend living near here—we used to go to school together—and she got me a place in a store. But I couldn't pay my board and Willie's and clothe us both out of that; and finally I concluded to leave the boy with Ellen, and get a place at service."

"And now I don't know whether Will is living or dead; but I can't help thinking that if he was living he would have written to me and sent me some money, for he always loved me."

It struck Mary's audience that he had a very strange way of showing his love; but then they were old maids, and could not expect to understand such matters.

Mary presently produced a photograph, which was just the opposite of what we expected; for her Sweet William was a fine, manly looking young fellow, and we felt drawn to him at once. But then we felt drawn to the postman, too; and it was absolutely essential to the latter's happiness that number one should have departed from this terrestrial scene. Until there was sufficient evidence of this, however, there was reason to fear an Enoch Arden denouement; and we assured Mary that it was positively wrong for her to give Mr. Blumenthal any encouragement.

It was probably owing to this disinterested advice that we were honored by a regular call from our hitherto taciturn friend. We were nearly as much surprised to hear him speak as though we had known him to be dumb; and when he propounded the somewhat startling question, "If I did not think the man who had married Mary ought to be dead by this one time," it did appear as though—if the person in question had a due regard for the fitness of things—he would be; but the point at issue was not so much whether he ought to be as whether he was.

Mr. Blumenthal, however, simply intended to express his firmly grounded opinion that William Murphy was dead, and that his widow would show her good sense by abandoning her present position of maid-of-all-work, and becoming Mrs. Blumenthal without delay. It seemed impossible to convince him

that California was not out of the world, and that travelers did occasionally return from that bourne. His own views of the region were evidently embodied in the belief that people who went there because they could not live here, ended by giving up the attempt at living altogether. He was certainly very much in love; and it would be an excellent match for Mary, even if he had not the regulation amount of limbs and belongings.

Brunhilda was quite carried away by the postman's eloquence and good looks. "I believe he is right," said she, when he had gone; "it is not at all probable that Murphy is living, or he would certainly have written to his wife." Adding, with her usual happy disregard of logic, "And why should two lives be spoiled with this uncertainty about a man who, after all, isn't worth it?"

I began to entertain a private opinion that Herr Blumenthal kept back our letters from mail to mail for the pleasure of bringing them singly, and having a moment's confab with Mary several times in the course of the day; for she had declined receiving visits from him until she could be assured that her husband was really dead. Poor girl! she was certainly very much to be pitied; and it seemed quite inexcusable in William Murphy to give her so little satisfaction either in living or dying.

But one morning something happened. Mary received a letter from her mother-in-law, that came through her friend Ellen, in which she was sternly summoned to attend her husband's funeral. He had died of fever in a hospital, and the remains, by his own dying request, had been sent on from San Francisco to be laid in the family burying-ground.

We read on with the letter in a sort of blank amazement, and read that, on the writer's arrival at the Murphy mansion, the first person she encountered was the deceased himself. As may be conjectured, he had never been dead at all, although he had been very ill with fever in a hospital, and, fancying himself dying, he had made the request to have his remains sent on to his parents. The occupant of the next cot had died, and the two became somewhat mixed up in the minds of the officials—hence the mistake, which, although inconvenient, was cheerfully borne with for the sake of seeing the lost son walk in alive and well.

Clothed in his right mind, too; for he had long ago deplored his evil ways, and his industry and self-denial had accumulated a nice little sum for the purchase of a cozy home nest. Thither wife and child were to be taken at once; and Mary wrote joyfully that she never knew how much she loved Will until she saw him standing before her at his father's door, when she supposed him to be dead.

Not a word of poor Carl Blumenthal, except to say that Will was so good, he did not blame her or Mr. B. in the least, and would certainly shake hands with the latter should he chance to meet him—only, he was very glad that he got home when he did.

We rejoiced, of course, in Mary's joy; but, if the truth must be told, we were very sorry for ourselves; and as to poor Mr. Blumenthal, he was scarcely to be thought of at all—his future stretched before us such a gray, dismal blank. We broke our dreadful news to him in fragments, giving him a morsel at a time as we thought him able to swallow it.

After a long period of silence, the deserted German shook his head sorrowfully, and said: "That one little woman she have a dreadful smile" (poor fellow, he meant "irresistible"), "and she speak German like to break my heart. She should not ought to, with her husband not dead."

Evidently he could not divest himself of the idea that Mary was in some way to blame for Mr. Murphy's unexpected appearance.

Brunhilda actually cried for sympathy, and took a melancholy pleasure in running to the door for our letters. But such is the ingratitude of human nature, that she was probably compared, somewhat to her disadvantage, with the lost one.

About six months elapsed, when we one day encountered our blighted friend with a fair-haired little woman clinging to his arm and looking very happy. She was evidently German, and as evidently his wife; and he subsequently informed us that she was an old sweetheart who had followed him from home. She had arrived just at the right time, to act as a poultice for the wounds inflicted by "that one little woman" with the "dreadful smile."

This arrangement naturally made things comfortable all around, with the exception, perhaps, of two lone women who had lost a treasure that could not be replaced.—*Barber's Bazar*.

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Do not rack it with violent purgatives, or permanently impair its tone with immoderate doses of any kind; but, if your digestion is impaired, your liver out of order, your frame debilitated, or nervous system unstrung, use that wholesome and agreeable alternative and tonic, Hostetter's Stomach Bitters, which will certainly afford you the desired relief. None of the official remedies can compare with it in restorative efficiency, and as a medicinal stimulant it is by far the most desirable as well as a popular article of its class. Its basis, the essential principle of sound rice, is the best possible agent for restoring the action of the biliary ingredients which it holds in solution, and these ingredients are the most efficacious which chemistry extracts from the vegetable kingdom, and medical science applies to the cure of disease.

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PREPARED BY

H. R. STEVENS, Boston, Mass.

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